

Best Practices for Placing and Labeling Recycling Containers in Michigan State Parks Guide

Where to place containers:

- **Next to trash containers-** Our primary goal is to make it just as easy to recycle as it is to throw things away. Placing recycling next to trash also cuts down on contamination of non-recyclable items and ease of final collection.
- **Ability to be emptied-** As with trash containers, recycling containers need to be easily accessible for both users and collectors, yet secure. For example, if the container is on a beach, whoever is emptying must be able to empty it with ease.
- **Where people have recyclables-** It may sound simple, but placing containers where trash and recycling are being generated is key to making sure they end up in a container and not on the ground.

Consideration for type of containers:

- **Indoor/Outdoor placement-** Be sure that containers are adequate for the application. Outdoor containers should be resistant to wind and precipitation.
- **Opening size-** Does it fit what material is being put in it? Can you reduce contamination by changing the type of opening it has? Will animals/rain/etc. be able to easily access it.
- **Uniform color-** If you have multiple recycling containers and trash containers, keeping them the same color throughout your location can help reduce confusion.
- **Ability to empty-** How is the trash and recycling collected in your park? Having a container that can easily be emptied is key to keeping staff motivated in participating in recycling.
- **Size-** Overflowing recycling and trash containers discourage recycling and container use and increase contamination trash in recycling containers. Find a container that meets the demand of recycling and how frequently it will require service.

Best practices for Labeling Containers:

- **Signs on every container-** Signs/labels are key for people understanding what they are supposed to put where.
- **Labels at multiple angles-** Place labels where people will see them. Depending on your container it may make sense to have labels on the side, as well as on top where people place the material, or a large recycling sign to attract people to where the recycling is, the Recycle, MI sign can be used to do this.
- **Uniformity-** If you collect paper in multiple locations, all of their signs should look the same to reduce confusion.
- **Clear Images-** Images are key, they reach past language and age barriers to allow people to understand what should and shouldn't be put in a container. Making sure you get an image that represents exactly what you'd like in your container is also important. If you only collect deposit bottles, having pictures of water bottles and milk containers on your container will be confusing for park visitors.

- **Color-** If your containers are color coded, making your signs color coded as well can reduce confusion and contamination.
- **Simple-** Less is more when it comes to words. People often make the decision to recycle very quickly.
- **Stationary placement-** If your dumpster/containers get replaced or switched out during collection, place don't place signs directly on the containers. This leads to lost and damaged signage that needs to be replaced more often than a permanent location.
- **Large Messages-** Especially in outdoor locations, having signs that are able to be read from far away helps people know recycling is happening at your location.

How to communicate about recycling:

- Signage at the entrance to your location proclaims your commitment and lets visitors know that recycling is available. The Recycle, MI large brown sign and the posters work well for prompting people to ask where they can recycle their discards.
- Tell people where to find the recycling containers. Place signage and messages in locations where people look to find location amenities. If you want to raise awareness about your program, have greeters and location staff tell people as they arrive about your recycling opportunities.
- Think of your location demographics, reminding people to carry a bag so they can pack recyclables out with them will make it easier for everyone. Other things like making signage bilingual can greatly increase the participation in your park programs.
- Meet with staff and volunteers regularly to get feedback about the program and how to improve it. This also is a good opportunity to keep everyone up to date with recycling diversion numbers, changes to the program, and availability of new marketing and educational tools.

Other Recycling Considerations:

- **Audits-** Have a staff person or volunteer in charge of performing routine 'audits' which check on fullness of containers, contamination, use, condition of containers, what's being thrown away that could be recycled, and staff feedback. Use these audits to make program improvements and goals.
- **Buying Habits-** Consider what kinds of things are purchased near your location, or are available for visitors to buy. Are these things recyclable? Can you alter purchasing decisions to include more recyclable materials or materials made from post-consumer recycled material?
- **Reusable Items-** what items may be able to be replaced to be reusable instead of disposable?
- **Policies-** Are there any policies that can be put in place for staff to recycle more. Mimicking behavior for visitors is key to program buy in. Reduction policies also help contribute to a waste conscious staff (ie: double-sided printing, shared office supplies, etc.).
- **Orientation-** For staff, volunteers, and even visitors, have recycling policies and education as part of orientation. This helps set the tone and expectations around waste management.
- **Pilot-** If you can add more containers, run a pilot program before adding any permanent fixtures like cement or chains. Make sure you've found the best location to fit your needs.

- **Education-** Keeping information on services and materials that are accepted current is key to keeping people engaged with your recycling program. Changing locations and types of promotional/educational signage helps to catch people's attention.

Additional Resources:

- For more information and Recycle, MI tools and resources you can go to www.MichiganRecycles.org or E-mail Info@MichiganRecycles.org.
- For ideas on how to improve your program, we suggest checking out how to earn your park a 4-star recycling rating on the MRC Certification page:
<http://www.michiganrecycles.org/index.php/advanced-stuff/business-style>